

A PLEA FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF TRAINED NURSES *

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: I am deeply sensible of the honor of addressing this great assembly in the interests of nursing. Trained nurses and the public are so closely united by the ties of friendship and mutual obligation that this seems an opportune moment to consider how best they can discharge the duties they owe to each other.

I trust you will not misunderstand me when I say that the public generally are not acquainted with the vital needs of trained nurses, and have not fully realized the very rapid process of evolution which nursing is passing through in order to keep pace with the demands made upon it by scientific medicine and surgery. Let me prove my point by reference to Florence Nightingale. I doubt very much if the large majority of persons who honor her name realize the significance of her unique work, which is the heritage of humanity. The world is apt to associate her name primarily with army-nursing reform, but it is not the Red Cross which will symbolize her life's work and immortalize her name when she goes hence, but the fact that she laid down the laws and principles of nursing on a scientific basis, and it is because she realized and enforced the truth that nursing is not only a technical handicraft, but a scientific profession, that the nurses of all nations owe her an inestimable debt.

The modern nurse, so fit and trim, is now indispensable in every sick-room. She is known to and honored by all. Nurses have qualified themselves for the duties demanded from them—their expert knowledge, their skill, and resourcefulness have only been acquired by years of practical work in the hospital wards and by many hours of theoretical study. This severe training successfully passed through, they are ready and willing to pour out a treasure of skilled and tender care for the benefit of the sick and suffering among rich and poor, and their only demand is that the educational curriculum—be it never so severe—shall fit them to perform their duties in the most thorough and acceptable manner.

With a few notable exceptions modern training-schools do not provide a complete system of nursing education, and I doubt if it is possible for them to do so.

* Read at the meeting in the Temple of Music, Saturday, September 21

It may be urged that the old order has passed and a new era dawned—that we have now good training-schools connected with our great hospitals where the best clinical material is at hand, that to these hospitals are attached well-regulated nurses' homes, under the direction of trained superintendents, provided with every comfort and even luxury; that theoretical teaching is organized, and practical details systematically taught; that hours on and off duty have been carefully regulated. All this being admitted, the question then may be asked—What more is required?

I own gratefully that much has been accomplished, and notably in the United States, but I would also urge that much remains to be done. Few who have studied the question will be prepared to admit that the nursing education afforded by the majority of our training-schools is the best which it is possible to give, and until this is unanimously conceded nurses must earnestly plead for increased facilities for acquiring knowledge in order to qualify themselves for their onerous vocation in the best possible manner.

Moreover, when our training-schools have thoroughly systematized their teaching there will still remain functions in relation to the education, discipline, and status of the trained nurse which will not come within their jurisdiction. Science and hospital economics are daily making such increased demands upon the intelligence and vitality of trained nurses, that with the best the training-schools have to give them they cannot go the pace.

To enumerate our most pressing needs, we require preliminary education before entering the hospital wards; we need post-graduate teaching to keep ourselves in the running; we need special instruction as teachers to fit us for the responsible positions of sisters and superintendents; we need a State-constituted board to examine and maintain discipline in our ranks, and we must have legal status to protect our professional rights and to insure to us ample professional autonomy.

We stand now at the Rubicon, and to cross it we need a gilded galley. We must either go forward or go back; beyond, we see plainly the flowery promised land; before us lies the organized and scientific profession of our dreams, in which every duly qualified nurse is registered as a skilled nursing practitioner. Behind us is that dreary downhill path, descending to a disorganized vocation of obsolete methods, in the ranks of which all kinds and conditions of workers—good, bad, and indifferent—struggle and compete.

Justice and self-respect demand that we shall go forward, and it is greatly to the honor of nurses that the cost of professional organization

and progressive educational methods has been financed by some of their members inspired by a high sense of professional duty.

Here in the United States I have only to allude to the splendid work accomplished by the Society of Superintendents of Training-Schools. Having associated themselves together to effect professional reform, they brought into existence the Alumnæ Associations of graduate nurses, which are grouped into a national society known as the Associated Alumnæ of Trained Nurses of the United States. Together the Superintendents' and Nurses' Societies form the Federation of American Nurses, a body which represents the profession in the National Council of Women, and which will at an early date also affiliate with the International Council of Nurses, which has called together this great Congress.

Again, when it was realized that American nurses must have a voice in the press, those same women came forward and undertook the entire financial responsibility of producing *THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING*, to which they have also given generous unpaid services.

Through the influence of the Society of Superintendents a post-graduate educational course for nurses desiring to qualify for the higher professional posts has been organized at Teachers' College, Columbia University, and the members of this society have ungrudgingly given their time and labor to make the course a success. We realize, therefore, that nurses have not been unmindful of their professional obligations.

But educational advantages for nurses mean a direct gain to the public, and I think you will agree with me that it is not just that the whole financial burden of the further advance of nursing should be entirely borne by nurses themselves. In other and richer professions the public take their share in financial support. Witness the magnificent universities, the endowed professorial chairs, the medical colleges, public libraries, and numerous organizations which afford opportunities of study to different sections of workers, resulting in the ultimate benefit of the community at large, but owing their existence to the munificence of a comparatively few public-spirited persons.

I claim that the time has come when nurses need their educational centres, their endowed colleges, their chairs of nursing, their university degrees, and State registration, and the present seems the psychological moment to come to the public, not as strangers, but as professional workers known and trusted through the length and breadth of the land, and to urge that, as nurses pour out on its behalf a skill and devotion for which gold is no real recompense, the public shall now prove its appreciation and interest in the noble work of nursing by giving some-

thing of its wealth to place nursing education and the status of the trained nurse on a strong financial basis.

Is it too much to hope that the wealthy will come forward and found colleges of nursing—colleges in which the teaching power of the profession would be focussed and centred, which would put the apex on our training course, and by improving the standard of nursing the sick confer a real and lasting benefit on humanity at large?

To pass from the consideration of the theoretical and technical curriculum of nursing education: A nurse cannot live by learning alone. We must consider also her Fantasy and Heart. The heart must be cultivated with as much assiduity as the understanding. True excellence of character is usually acquired by self-cultivation, by patient and unwearied endeavor, and it is founded on the conviction that intellectual attainments alone are those which can exalt the mind, that pure and virtuous feelings alone are those which can adorn it. To this end we would have nurses come into touch with all that is purest, wisest, and most potent for good in this beautiful world, to do which they must take their part in the civil and social movements of the time, realize the obligations of citizenship, and appreciate at their true value national and international events. They must live with others, not altogether for them.

During this last decade there has grown up the great International Council of Women, initiated, I need hardly say, by an American woman, to which the women workers of the world gathered into National Councils are affiliated. Listen to the preamble of the constitution: "Sincerely believing that the best good of humanity will be advanced by greater unity of thought, sympathy, and purpose, we hereby bind ourselves together in a confederation of workers committed to the overthrow of all forms of ignorance and injustice, and to the application of the Golden Rule of society, law, and custom."

Would it not be well that this Mother Council should attach to itself by the silken strings of sympathy international societies of experts, such as the nurses have founded in their International Council of Nurses, and thus encourage them in their social and moral development? And would it not also be well that it should gather from us, for its own intellectual expansion, all the expert information we have to impart? In conclusion, may I recapitulate the three points which I wish to impress upon your kind attention, and through the good offices of the press on others also:

1. The need for a more thorough and better organized educational curriculum for trained nurses, and the foundation and endowment of colleges in which such education can be centred.

2. The advantages of an International Council of Nurses for the furtherance of the social and professional progress of nurses, and for the maintenance of a high standard of nursing ethics and *esprit de corps*.

3. The advantages of the affiliation of international societies of experts with the International Council of Women for mutual intellectual expansion and organization.

IN HOSPITAL

By M. E. R.

I. LOW FEVER.

THERE was a "service of song" at the Methodist chapel across the way. As the noise came through my open window I could imagine the chapel interior—the air palpitating around the gas-burners, the unvarying type of face in the perspiring congregation, the cheap attempts at decoration, and the stifling smell of the place. On the hottest night of midsummer they were singing the delights of the Heavenly Jerusalem,—

"To be there, to be there,
Oh, what must it be to be there!"

So the words ran, as the stiff, untrained throats of the singers, failing at the higher notes of the refrain, flattened in horrible discord.

Sickness destroys one's power of resistance to external impressions, I suppose, for as I lay there, helpless to get away, the Heaven they sang of seemed insistently near.

Pain was not so bad, after all, though my head and side throbbed furiously; and there might be worse than to lie in the dark in a strange room, consumed with thirst. Who was that invalid, I wondered, who made a practice of cataloguing all the small pleasantnesses of her daily life, recalling them in the night watches? The way a bird cocks his head on one side when he looks at you, the shock of cool, fresh water in the morning, the first dip into a new magazine as you cut the leaves,—these, as I recalled them, were some of the things she cared to record. But I recalled them with difficulty, could not realize them at all, for that intruding conception of a Heaven all tinsel and noise.

It had been a fatal year for typhoids. Perhaps a lurking fear of being ridiculous had saved me, so far, from taking my condition too seriously; but fever plays queer pranks with one's brain, and, for a bad minute, the fear, not of death itself, but of going to an orthodox Heaven, held me as in a vise.